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SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS MINISTER SUPPORTS FORUM FOR THE
FUTURE AND REQUESTS GTMO ACCESS FROM DRL DAS

Classified By: CDA Angie Bryan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(SBU) SUMMARY: Yemeni Human Rights Minister Huda al-Ban told visiting DRL DAS Erica Barks-Ruggles that her Ministry will support civil society during the December Forum for the Future in Sana'a. The Minister was responsive on press freedom issues in general, but would not commit to follow-up on specific cases. Al-Ban also highlighted the Ministry's human rights initiatives and requested access to GTMO to ensure humane treatment of Yemeni detainees, but is unlikely to come through with a formal request given the ROYG's current plans to send a separate delegation to adjudicate the citizenship of allegedly Yemeni detainees. END SUMMARY

Forum for the Future
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2.(U) During her visit to Sana'a for the first preparatory meeting for the Forum for the Future (to be held in Sana'a in December 2007), DRL DAS Erica Barks-Ruggles met with Minister of Human Rights Huda al-Ban on June 4, accompanied by the then-DCM and PolOff. Al-Ban said she believes that the Ministry of Human Rights (MHR) and NGOs have "a lot of things in common," and need to establish a working partnership for human rights. According to al-Ban, many members of the MHR's technical committee belong to civil society organizations, thereby facilitating good relations between MHR and Yemen's NGOs. The Minister said the MHR would morally support civil society during the Forum for the Future, which is expected to bring NGO members from the MENA and G-8 countries to participate in both a Parallel Civil Society Forum and the Ministerial.

Guantanamo Visit
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3.(SBU) The Minister asked the DAS for access to visit Yemeni detainees currently held at GTMO. Al-Ban explained that the MHR needs to ensure that Yemenis are being treated humanely while in detention. Both the DAS and the then-DCM asked that the Minister present an official letter from the ROYG asking for access. (Note: The MHR has to go through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to make such a request. Post has since learned that the Minister decided not to approach the MFA until she discusses the matter with the Prime Minister. Al-Ban has yet to do so. Post will send updates on the matter as they develop. End Note)

Human Rights Issues
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4.(U) Al-Ban discussed the Ministry's efforts to monitor human rights through visits to (local) prisons. The Minister has worked tirelessly on cases involving juveniles and women. This year, for example, the MHR stopped three death sentences against juveniles from proceeding. The Ministry is

also developing an educational program which aims to introduce human rights topics into public school curricula. Al-Ban added that the Ministry operates two human rights hotlines, one for child trafficking and the other for human rights abuses.

5.(U) Al-Ban noted that the Ministry's complaints department provides citizens with direct access to the MHR, and sometimes to the Minister herself, two days a week. In response to the DAS' questions about bans on text messaging services and concerns about freedom of the press, the Minister stated that the MHR would seriously investigate any alleged violence against or harassment of members of the press, but did not commit to investigating the two specific cases raised.

6.(U) Al-Ban concluded by citing the Ministry's efforts to support women's empowerment in coordination with the Yemen Women,s Union and the Yemen National Women's Committee. The MHR, according to al-Ban, is currently working on a project to build a rehabilitation center for women released from prison.

7.(C) COMMENT: Post does not expect to receive any official request for GTMO access from the Minister of Human Rights any time soon. Her initiative will most likely be stopped by higher ranking officials. The ROYG is attempting to send a delegation to adjudicate the citizenship of allegedly Yemeni detainees and al-Ban is not in a position to make such adjudications. END COMMENT

8.(U) DAS Barks-Ruggles has cleared this cable.

BRYAN